

## Floral designers

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### Significant Points

- Job opportunities should be good because of relatively high replacement needs stemming from low starting pay and limited advancement opportunities.
- Floral design is the only design specialty that does not require formal postsecondary training.
- Many floral designers work long hours on weekends and holidays, filling orders and setting up decorations for weddings and other events.
- About 1 out of 3 is self-employed.

### Nature of the Work

*Floral designers*, or florists, cut live, dried, or silk flowers and other greenery and arrange them into displays of various sizes and shapes. They design these displays by selecting flowers, containers, and ribbons and arranging them into bouquets, corsages, centerpieces of tables, wreaths, and the like for weddings, funerals, holidays, and other special occasions. Some floral designers also utilize accessories such as balloons, candles, toys, candy, and gift baskets as part of their displays.

Job duties can vary by type of employment setting. Most floral designers work in small independent floral shops that specialize in custom orders and also handle large orders for weddings, caterers, or interior designers. Floral designers may meet with customers to discuss the arrangement or work from a written order. They note the occasion, the customer's preferences, the price of the order, the time the floral display or plant is to be ready, and the place to which it is to be delivered. For special occasions, floral designers usually will help set up floral decorations. Floral designers also will prearrange a few displays to have available for walk-in customers or last-minute orders. Some floral designers also assist interior designers in creating live or silk displays for hotels, restaurants, and private residences.

Some florists work in the floral departments of grocery stores or for Internet florists, which specialize in creating prearranged floral decorations and bouquets. These floral retailers also may fill small custom orders for special occasions and funerals, but some grocery store florists do not deliver to clients or handle large custom orders. Florists who work for wholesale flower distributors assist in the selection of different types of flowers and greenery to purchase and sell to retail florists. Wholesale floral designers also select flowers for displays that they use as examples for retail florists.

Self-employed floral designers must handle the various aspects of running their own businesses, such as selecting and purchasing flowers, hiring and supervising staff, and maintaining financial records. Self-employed designers also may run gift shops or wedding consultation businesses in addition to providing floral design services. Some conduct design workshops for amateur gardeners or others with an interest in floral design.

### Working Conditions

Most floral designers work in comfortable, well-lit spaces in retail outlets or at home, although working outdoors is sometimes required. Designers also may frequently make short trips delivering flowers, setting up arrangements for special events, and procuring flowers and other supplies.

Floral designers have frequent contact with customers and must work to satisfy their demands, including last-minute holiday and funeral



*A significant portion of a floral designer's job is arranging flowers and other greenery into custom displays for special occasions.*

orders. Because many flowers are perishable, most orders cannot be completed too far in advance. As a result, some designers often work long hours before and during holidays. Some also work nights and weekends to complete large orders for weddings and other special events.

Floral designers may suffer muscle strain from long periods of standing and from repeated finger and arm movements required to make floral arrangements. They are susceptible to back strain from lifting and carrying heavy flower arrangements. Designers also may suffer allergic reactions to certain types of pollen when working with flowers. In addition, they frequently use sharp objects—scissors, knives, and metal wire—that can cause injuries if handled improperly.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Floral design is the only design occupation that does not require formal postsecondary training; most floral designers learn their skills on the job. Employers generally look for high school graduates who have creativity, a flair for arranging flower, and a desire to learn. Many florists gain their initial experience working as cashiers or delivery people in retail floral stores. The completion of formal design training, however, is an asset for floral designers, particularly those interested in advancing to chief floral designer or in opening their own businesses.

Private floral schools, vocational schools, and community colleges award certificates in floral design. These programs generally require a high school diploma for admission and last from several weeks to 1 year. Floral design courses teach the basics of arranging flowers—the different types of flowers there are, their color and texture, cutting and taping techniques, tying bows and ribbons, proper handling and care of flowers, floral trends, and pricing.

Some floral designers also may choose to attend an associate's or bachelor's degree program at a community college or university. Some programs offer formal degrees in floral design, while others offer degrees in floriculture, horticulture, or ornamental horticulture, which can prepare students for a career in floral design. In addition to floral design courses, these programs teach courses in botany, chemistry, hydrology, microbiology, pesticides, and soil management.

Since many floral designers manage their own business, additional courses in business, accounting, marketing, and computer technology can be helpful.

The American Institute of Floral Designers offers an accreditation examination as an indication of professional achievement in floral design. The exam consists of a written part covering floral terminology and an onsite floral-arranging test in which candidates have 4 hours to complete five floral designs. The five categories of floral designs are

funeral tributes, table arrangements, wedding arrangements, wearable flowers, and in one category of the candidate's choosing.

Floral designers must be creative, service oriented, and able to communicate their ideas visually and verbally. Because trends in floral design change quickly, designers must be open to new ideas and react quickly to changing trends. Problem-solving skills and the ability to work independently and under pressure also are important traits. Individuals in this field need self-discipline to budget their time and meet deadlines.

Advancement in the floral field is limited. After a few years of on-the-job training, designers can either advance to a supervisory position or open their own floral shop.

### **Employment**

Floral designers held about 98,000 jobs in 2004. Approximately 1 out of 3 was self-employed. Almost half of all floral designers worked in florist shops. Another 8 percent worked in the floral departments of grocery stores. Others were employed by miscellaneous nondurable goods merchant wholesalers, other general merchandise stores, and in lawn and garden equipment and supply stores.

### **Job Outlook**

Employment of floral designers is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2014. Job opportunities should be good because of the relatively high replacement needs in retail florists that result from comparatively low starting pay and limited opportunities for advancement.

The demand for floral designers will continue to grow as flower sales increase as a result of the increasing population and lavishness of weddings and other special events that require floral decorations. As disposable incomes rise, more people also desire fresh flowers in their homes and offices. Increased spending on interior design also is creating demand for stylish artificial arrangements for homes and businesses.

Opportunities should be available in grocery store and Internet floral shops as sales of floral arrangements from these outlets grow. The prearranged displays and gifts available in these stores appeal to consumers because of the convenience and because of prices that are lower than can be found in independent floral shops.

As mass marketers capture more of the small flower orders, independent floral shops are increasingly finding themselves under pressure to remain profitable. Many independent shops have added online ordering systems in order to compete with Internet florists. Others are trying to distinguish their services by specializing in certain areas of floral design or by combining floral design with event planning and interior design services. Some florists also are adding holiday decorating services in which they will set up decorations for businesses and residences.

Few job opportunities are expected in floral wholesalers, primarily because an increasing number of shops are purchasing flowers and supplies directly from growers in order to cut costs. In addition, the growth of e-commerce in the floral industry will make it easier for retail florists to locate their own suppliers.

### **Earnings**

Median annual earnings for wage and salary floral designers were \$20,450 in May 2004. The middle 50 percent earned between \$16,670 and \$25,610. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$14,360, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$32,370. Median annual earnings were \$22,520 in grocery stores and \$20,110 in florists.

### **Related Occupations**

Other art and design occupations include artists and related workers, commercial and industrial designers, fashion designers, graphic designers, and interior designers. Landscape architects also create

designs involving plants and flowers. Other occupations that work directly with plants and flowers include soil and plant scientists; and farm workers and laborers, crop, nursery, and greenhouse.

### **Sources of Additional Information**

For information about careers in floral design, contact:

► American Institute of Floral Designers, 720 Light St., Baltimore, MD 21230. Internet: <http://www.aifd.org>

► Society of American Florists, 1601 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.safnow.org>